

**The Media Center**  
**Digital Cameras: Management Hassles; Curriculum Possibilities**

Mary Alice Anderson, Lead Media Specialist  
Winona Area Public Schools, Winona MN

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Cables, adapters and memory cards disappear; batteries run low at inopportune times and busy teachers quickly borrow a camera from another classroom “just for a second ” to take advantage of a photo opp. Digital photographers excited about creating photo filled classroom web pages come to work sessions with a camera incompatible with the computer’s software or without the necessary connecting cable. It seems that no technology has caused more management hassles than digital cameras. The problems are a natural result of human forgetfulness, busy schedules and non-ending technological change. Equally frustrating is the “just shoot and print” approach. It’s disappointing to see tools with great potential to enhance curriculum and communicate with families used only to fill classroom bulletin boards while a small fortune goes into color printing. While well intended and a nice touch for the classroom, such an approach does take not advantage of the camera’s potential as a curricular tool.

**Management hassles** can be lessened with a few simple precautions. Some tips and techniques are:

- Install the camera software on the computers teachers are using to make it convenient for them to use the camera.
- Store each camera and its components in a camera case with a strap or a tote box. (Include the manual)
- Identify each camera and its components uniquely. For example, place a green mark on each part of camera unit 1; place a red mark on each part of camera unit 2 etc.
- Create a luggage style tag listing all the components of the unit and attach to the case or secure it in the storage unit.
- Check cameras in and out through the automation system and insist nothing is just passed on to another person. Inspect each unit before it leaves the media center and when it is returned.
- Keep an extra supply of batteries with each camera and keep battery chargers plugged in and readily available for use, especially during prime photography time.

A Minnesota media specialist noted the challenges batteries present. “Just from my own experience in a work environment managing batteries for battery-driven devices is a challenge due to the many different people who use them, who assist with handling them, and then the potential for dealing with multiple battery types just within the AA size.” He offered considerations and shared the guidelines he found on the Web.\* He posts abbreviated guidelines by battery chargers in his media center.

**Please follow these rules for caring for our rechargeable batteries:**

- Right now we are using rechargeable NIMH batteries BUT of varying strength and brand. Do not mix old and new batteries or batteries of different types. Never mix rechargeable and non-rechargeable batteries.
- High temperature during charge and standby kills batteries. (Do not expose batteries to temperatures above 110 degrees F. For example, leaving batteries in your car in the hot summer sun can result in permanent damage. Your best bet is to store them in a place that’s cool and dry.)
- Do not overcharge the batteries. Take them out of the charger or unplug the charger once batteries are charged. There can still be a small current flowing in chargers even that say they are off. This can cause a deep discharge over a longer period of time that damages the battery and, in extreme cases, destroys it.
- Do recharge your batteries before or after long-term storage. Batteries discharge over time, and if not recharged they may leak and corrode the camera/recorder.
- Do not throw your batteries away when they run out of juice. They are chemical waste. Follow the battery manufacturer’s disposal and recycling instructions or the recommended guidelines for your local area. Never incinerate or puncture batteries.

## Curriculum Possibilities

In a recent survey very high majority of the teachers in our district said they are comfortable with using a digital camera (55%). Many would like to learn more. (35%) Conversely, only 6% said they have designed curriculum projects using digital photos or a project that requires students to use digital photos.

<b>Digital cameras</b> (One of the following)	Responses:	85
I have never used one before. (6%)	5	
I would like to learn more about how I could use a digital camera. (35%)	30	
I am comfortable using a digital camera. (55%)	47	
No response: (4%)	3	
<b>Digital cameras in my classroom</b> (One of the following)	Responses:	69
I have access to a digital camera (88%)	61	
I have designed a curricular project using digital photographs (6%)		
I have designed a curricular project that requires students to use digital photographs (6%)		
No response (6%)	4	

Plainly, we need to expand curriculum potential with more modeling, staff development and collaboration. Sound familiar? Digital camera curriculum ideas are abundant in professional journals. Johanna Riddle describes several exciting projects in her article "Bookbinders: Fusing Technology, Image, and Literature" published in the March/April 2006 issue of this journal. Riddle's activities are extensive, interdisciplinary and exciting. I encourage you to take a look. What are the 6% of the teachers in my district doing? What are some other ways to enhance curriculum with digital cameras?"

- A high school special education teacher took photos of food products at a local grocery store where she takes her students to apply their menu planning and math skills. The photos were used to provide illustrations for a statewide test given to special education students. The photos helped the students think through their task as they completed word problems. As a side benefit, the teacher gained new digital photo editing and Microsoft Word skills as she created a useful tool she can use again.
- A middle school geography teacher's postcard project sounds low-tech and simple at first glance, yet it incorporates several information and technology literacy skills. Students take photos of each other with a digital camera while they are posed in a pose appropriate to geographic setting. (I.e. Straddling the headwaters of the Mississippi River; riding a camel) Using photo-editing software they place themselves in a photo of the geographic setting they are studying in class. Finally, they design and create a postcard and write a letter home.
- A high school teacher loves digital cameras because they "they teach kids to be observant." She especially loves using cameras to document science projects and experiments. Sound familiar? Yes, is this happening in your school? Can you work with teachers and students to encourage similar uses of digital cameras?
- One of my personal instructional favorite activities is using the "Eye Spy Math" PowerPoint available from the Library of Congress Learning Page. 4<sup>th</sup> grade students get excited as they review the geometric shapes in a small collection of primary source photos. The lesson is an excellent review before a state math assessment. <http://memory.loc.gov/learn/educators/handouts/EyeSpyFiles/EyeSpyMathFeb05.ppt> A follow-up activity to get students even more involved is working with them to take photos of local buildings and create their own Eye Spy Math slide show.
- Take photos of buildings in your town; compare them with historical pictures of what was on the site a century ago, or compare how the building has changed by looking at historical photos.
- Our district's web software makes it relatively easy to batch upload photos quickly and classroom web pages with photos of kids and classroom activities have a high hit rate. Two kindergarten web pages with frequently updated photo galleries often have more hits than the rest of the school's pages combined. Parents and families love the photos; school-home ties are enhanced. If your web site (or school policies) doesn't make it so easy to add photos, try one of the many photo services available and share the link to the others. Options include Google Picasa, Iphoto and a .MAC account for Mac OSX users, or Photo Story for Windows <http://www.microsoft.com/windowsxp/using/digitalphotography/photostory/default.msp> you will find something you and your teachers will love.

These ideas aren't new, but they may be new to a teacher looking for an easy to manage curriculum focused project tool. Everything is relative.

### **From Bulletin Boards to Curriculum integration? Getting there?**

Digital camera classes that we offer for staff development always are popular. Our survey suggests they will continue to be popular at our summer and fall 2007 classes since topics related to digital cameras and PowerPoint were the most frequently mentioned topics of interest. We plan to offer classes that address very specific topics such as moving photos from your camera to computer/server space, photo editing, graphic formats, creating classroom web sites and photo galleries, creative uses of digital photos, non-traditional PowerPoint, and content specific curriculum applications for digital cameras. Continuing collaboration and on-on one, just in time support will continue to be as important as formal training.

Hassles, work. . . yes, indeed. A media center secretary and I recently dealt with issues such as a missing camera, a camera with no cable, and a teacher with wonderful pictures who didn't know how to upload them to the computer. But soon after helping him, we saw the final product of his work—a wonderful PowerPoint slide show crated for his student's promotion celebration. It was cool, rewarding, and heartwarming. That's what it's all about.

\* One article is "Battery Care and Maintenance," <http://is.med.ohio-state.edu/policies/battery.htm>. Do your own search; you will find many informative articles.

*Mary Alice Anderson is a contributor to professional journals and available as a conference and workshop presenter. She is the Lead Media Specialist for Winona Area Public Schools in Minnesota and is an online adjunct instructor with the Online Professional Development for Educators Program in the School of Education at University of Wisconsin—Stout. She received a Top Online Educator recognition from SurfAcquarium in 2006. Her personal Web site can be found at <http://www.homepage.mac.com/Maryalicea/Sites/Anderson/Anderson.html>. Communications to the author may be sent to [maryalicea@mac.com](mailto:maryalicea@mac.com).*